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Hugo Mendez

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SOUTHERN ADVENTIST UNIVERSITY

SOULS IN DISTRESS:
ANGELIC-PSYCHICAL INTERACTIONS AND THE COSMIC TRANSFIGURATION
OF DEATH IN EARLY JUDEO-CHRISTIAN APOCALYPTIC

IN FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENTS FOR
RELB 495: REVELATION IN JEWISH APOCALYPTIC CONTEXT
AND THE SOUTHERN SCHOLARS HONORS PROGRAM

BY

HUGO MENDEZ

COLLEGEDALE, TN

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To Mark Peach

INTRODUCTION

Among Palestinian Jews, speculation regarding the activity of the dead in the intermediate state emerged in the final three centuries B.C.E., once a Hellenistic conception of "the soul" had penetrated Judaism.¹ Apocalyptic texts are often the most fertile sources of such speculations, as they allege prophetic insight into eschatological secrets. A common motif within these works depicts the disembodied souls of the righteous petitioning God as they await their resurrection, usually in an attempt to hasten their reward or vindication.

This image expands two earlier literary devices, prevalent throughout the Hebrew Bible. According to the Law, blood "pollutes the land" when spilled in murder (Num 35:33). Consequently, the slaying of any innocent human demands swift retribution from the God who avenges the creatures fashioned in His image (Gen 9:3; Ps 9:12). The Biblical writers illustrated the constraining power of this divine obligation by personifying the blood of the slain, which audibly cries out to God for justice as if endowed with a voice (Gen 4:10; Job 16:19). A second literary device, limited to prayers offered up by the living (who actually have a voice to raise), is neatly summarized in the cry, "How long . . . ?" This phrase expresses the desperation of a man awaiting a supernatural response to prayer, likely in the form of reward, vindication, or vengeance (Pss 6:3; 13:1-2; 35:17; 80:4; *passim*).

1. Gershon Bacon, "Soul," *The Oxford Dictionary of the Jewish Religion*, ed. R.J. Zwi Werblowsky and Geoffrey Wigoder (New York: Oxford, 1997), 654.

Jewish and Christian apocalypses in the post-Exilic period drew from both devices, considering each an apt reflection of the emotions troubling the righteous in the afterlife. Thus, ideas of vengeance and reward, impatience and urgency are revisited in those passages that include the motif of souls clamoring for vindication. Reconstituted and expanded within the cosmology of each text, they acquire a new, cosmic meaning.

This cosmic dimension is especially apparent beside a second feature of apocalyptic literature: detailed descriptions of angelic activity. The emergence of a sophisticated angelology in the post-exilic period represents a parallel development to the evolution of Jewish eschatology. Angels are named (e.g., Michael in Dan 10:13-21; 12:1; 1 Enoch 20; 40; 1 QM 9:15-16; Gabriel in Dan 8-9; 1 Enoch 20; 40; 1 QM 9:15-16), and angelic guides become indispensable characters within apocalyptic texts (Gabriel in Dan 8-9). Likewise, more elaborate descriptions of the activities of celestial beings are recorded, especially their efforts on behalf of the people of God in both battle and intercession (e.g., Dan 10:10-20). Accordingly, those passages that portray the activity of the righteous dead usually represent the ministry of angelic beings on their behalf as well.

This survey will encompass selections from four apocalypses (Jewish and Christian), written between c. 200 B.C.E. and c. 100 C.E.: the Book of Watchers, the Similitudes of Enoch, 4 Ezra, and the Apocalypse of John (Revelation). A thorough analysis of these passages will demonstrate that apocalyptic writers assumed regular, literal interaction between angelic ministers and the souls of the dead, either as intercessory partners, mediatorial proxies, or agents of divine response. The attention and energies of multitudes in the celestial realm are focused specifically upon the righteous, often with eschatological results. This

relation reinforces an emerging belief in the cosmic dimension of death, in which the destiny of the saints is ultimately intertwined with the destiny of the universe.

Each of these books includes at least one reference to the souls of the righteous deceased petitioning the Lord from the intermediate state; together, they represent the clearest examples of this motif before the turn of the second century CE. Three of the four works provide further descriptions of the state of the dead in the intermediate state (Book of Watchers [1 Enoch] 22:1-14; Similitudes of Enoch [1 Enoch] 39:1-8; 4 Ezra 4:41-43; 7:32, 100).² All four works will be studied in English translation: the first three according to J.H. Charlesworth's critical edition,³ and Revelation according to the rendering of the New Revised Standard Version.

2. Revelation is the only apocalypse embraced by this study that lacks a detailed cosmology of the intermediate state. Nevertheless, this study will assume that its references to the "souls" of the dead envision spiritual entities akin to those introduced in 1 Enoch and 4 Ezra. The (lexical, structural) parallels between the relevant passages in each text suggest a common literary tradition, within which the nature of the referent subjects is rooted in post-Exilic eschatological ideas, rather than traditional Hebraic modes of thought.

3. *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth, (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983).

CHAPTER 1

THE BOOK OF WATCHERS (1 Enoch 1-36)¹

Background

The First (Ethiopic) Apocalypse of Enoch is a composite work, encompassing five distinct texts. Aramaic manuscripts of the first text (usually referred to as the "Book of Watchers") were discovered at Qumran, the oldest fragments confirming that it was composed by the third century B.C.E.² Scholars believe the text was written by a scribe living in Judea³ and cite its popularity within both Jewish and Christian circles in subsequent centuries. Evidence of its New Testament circulation is evident in the New Testament itself, where one writer explicitly quotes it (Jude 1:14). As an apocalyptic text, the Book of Watchers appears to have played a seminal role in the development of the entire genre; it contains the earliest description of the (particular and final) judgments of the dead in the Jewish tradition.⁴

Survey

The Book of Watchers includes two references to the intercessory

1. J. H. Charlesworth, "1 (Ethiopian Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth. (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 5-89.

2. Michael E. Stone, *Jewish Writings of the Second Temple Period* (Philadelphia: Fortress, 1984), 391.

3. John J. Collins, "From Prophecy to Apocalypticism," in *The Encyclopedia of Apocalypticism*, vol. 1., ed. John J. Collins, (New York: Continuum, 1998), 135.

4. Ibid., 139.

activity of the righteous dead. The first appears at the end of the first narrative sequence, describing the fall of the "sons of God" who lusted after the daughters of men (an embellishment of the story in Gen 6:1-4). Led by Samyez, approximately two hundred heavenly beings descend to engage in intercourse with human women (7:1). The prophet describes the children of these transnatural unions in chapter 7. Spreading violence upon the earth, these giants devour blood, animals, men, and one another. In chapter 8, the earthly activity of these fallen angels is further detailed. Individual angels introduce cosmetics and jewelry among the women, as well as weapons, astrology, and witchcraft among men. A new generation of depraved humans emerges: "And there were many wicked ones and they committed adultery and erred, and all their conduct became corrupt" (8:2).

Amidst the spreading violence, desperate pleas rise to God, as recorded in the closing verses of both chapters 7 and 8:

"And then the earth brought an accusation against the oppressors."
(7:5)

"And (the people) cried out and their voice reached unto heaven."
(8:4)

These prayers are mediated through the intercession of angelic beings in chapter 9:

Then Michael, Surafel, and Gabriel observed carefully from the sky and they saw much blood being shed upon the earth, and all oppression being wrought upon the earth. And they said to one another, "The earth, (from) her empty (foundation), has brought the cry of their voices unto the gates of heaven. And now, [O] holy ones of heaven, the souls of people are putting their case before you pleading, 'Bring our judgment before the Most High.' " And they said to the Lord of the potentates, ". . . those who have died will bring their suit up to the gate of heaven. Their groaning has ascended (into heaven), but they could not get out from before the face of the oppression that is being wrought on earth." (9:1-4,10)

Michael, Surafel, and Gabriel (together with Raphael, Raguel, and Saraqa'el) are elsewhere listed as "watchers" (20:1-7), archangels appointed to the observance of human events. Having appraised the

violence upon the earth, these angels present the complaints of the righteous before the Most High. Among the classes on whose behalf they plead are listed those who could not escape the oppression upon the earth (i.e., the slain martyrs) despite their prayers for assistance (9:11). "Those who have died will bring their suit up to the gate of heaven," the angels warn, anticipating Enoch's vision of these individuals during his second cosmological tour, related in chapter 22.

In that (second) passage, Enoch is transported to a great mountain with beautiful corners, "created so that the spirits of the souls of the dead should assemble into them" (22:3). Within the book's cosmology, this is the intermediate state, where the souls of both the righteous and wicked are detained "until the day of their judgment and the appointed time of the great judgment upon them" (22:4). Prominent among the class of the righteous dead are "the souls of those who make suit" (cf. 22:12), corresponding to the class on whose behalf the archangels interceded:

I saw the spirits of the children of the people who were dead, and their voices were reaching unto heaven until this very moment. I asked Rufael, the angel who was with me, and said to him, "This spirit, the voice of which is reaching (into heaven) like this and is making suit, whose (spirit) is it?" And he answered me, saying, "This is the spirit which had left Abel, whom Cain, his brother, had killed; it (continues to) sue him until all of (Cain's) seed is exterminated from the face of the earth, and his seed has disintegrated from among the seed of the people. (22:5-7)

Among the souls of the righteous are many who, awaiting "the appointed time of the great judgment," perpetually plead for the execution of God's just vengeance upon the wicked. Abel, the first victim of murder and prototypical plaintiff (cf. Gen 4:10, where Abel's personified blood cries for justice), stands foremost among them. His petition—a call to rid the earth of his murderer's seed—exemplifies the prayers of all those who utter accusations and seek the final extermination of the wicked. Of note, the assurance of a coming judgment

in no way mitigates the tenacity of his prayers; rather, they will not cease until his hunger for justice is satisfied.

Analysis

In the first passage, the petitions of the righteous (living and dead, as mediated through angelic intercessors) appear critical in moving Heaven to action against the wickedness attending earth. The Most High pronounces a sentence upon the guilty angels and humans (chap. 10) immediately following the prayer of the Watchers (chap. 9). That order moves the angels to immediate action against the culpable parties; it also prophesies the advance of a day of "eternal judgment" after an incarceration lasting "seventy generations" (10:12). Thus, the divine order comes in direct response to their request: the prayers of the righteous apparently forcing the hand of God.

In the second passage, the souls of the righteous await the complete fulfillment of that sentence: the Day of Judgment. However, the perpetual cries issued by the righteous (which continue long after the pronouncement of judgment) are powerless to hasten it: the eschaton is an "appointed time" fixed by God (22:4). For the souls in the intermediate state, these accusations only serve to keep God in continual remembrance of the sin of the wicked.

This remembrance is not a mere mental recollection, as the text presupposes that God's omniscience is already aware of every event transpiring on earth:

Everything is naked and open before your sight, and you see everything, and there is nothing which can hide itself from you. You see what Azazel has done . . . [recounts Azazel's wicked deeds]. (9:5-6)

In their prayer, the archangels cite this fact to appeal to the eternal instinct of justice proper to God (in which crime requires intervention). They are painfully aware that no response has yet been issued to deal

with the situation on earth. As this divine inactivity (or better, patience) might be construed as indifference, the angels plead with "the Lord of righteousness" (22:14), imploring him to act in accord with His nature.

It is at this juncture that the Watchers invoke the pleadings of the righteous to elicit a response from Divinity (9:10). In one sense, the remembrance effected by these prayers may be understood as a legal presentation—evidence submitted before the court. The souls are plaintiffs, driven by an indomitable desperation for justice to seek an audience with the cosmic Judge. And, although judgment has been pronounced in their favor in the first passage, the saints continue to plead until God delivers their compensation in its fullness.

Another dimension—a relational dimension—enhances the efficacy of the prayers. An appeal to the plight of the righteous souls challenges the patience of God (which mercifully delays the execution of his vengeance) by citing the *impatience* of the victims: their desperation, fury, and humiliation. A divine quandary is exposed; the Lord's (covenantal) fidelity to the righteous struggles against His longsuffering endurance towards the wicked. The frustrated souls exemplify an argument striving within the heart of the Most High Himself.

Another aspect of this tension emerges from an implicit accusation against Heaven's failure to protect the righteous, submitted in 9:10: "Their groaning has ascended (into heaven), but they could not get out from before the face of the oppression that is being wrought on earth." A debt is owed to the innocent who, though true to God and seeking his assistance, were nonetheless slain; this "breach" of their trust must be compensated. Accordingly, the distresses of the righteous dead intimately appeal to the heart of God: they are the human victims—the human faces—victimized by sin.

Attention should also be paid to the role of the Watchers within both passages. The ministry of this distinct class of angelic beings ("the holy angels who watch" [20:1]) figures prominently throughout the entire work. Its heavenly members are the principal instruments of the will of God. Conversely, the fallen angels were once "Watchers," who, for lust, abandoned their stations to pursue and corrupt the humanity they were appointed to protect (12:4). They perverted their office.

The ministry of the Watchers encompasses three primary functions. The first--the observation of earthly events--is oriented towards the fulfillment of the second function: that of intercession. The Watchers are mediators, representing the concerns of earth before heaven. Receiving the prayers ascending to heaven from both living and dead, they present these supplications before the Most High, contributing to the audience to which the dead are already entitled (9:10). As the apocalypse's cosmology places the intermediate state in a location distinct from that of the immediate presence of God, the Watchers reinforce the prayers of the righteous. They stand as advocates or proxies on behalf of the spirits: granting them a permanent, local representation before the throne.

A final function is apparent in the divine sentence issued after the angels' intercessory prayer (10:1-22): the same angels who prayed on behalf of the righteous are dispatched to execute the justice they requested. Rafael is ordered to bind Azaz'el; Gabriel will slaughter the giants; Michael will bind Semyaza and the other fallen angels (10:4, 9, 11). Intercession is bound to intervention: each angel doubles as an instrument of the divine justice for which they plead.

Perhaps this final function illuminates the fundamental purpose of angelic intercession as conceived by the author of the text. At the end of their prayer, having recounted the wickedness upon the earth, the

Watchers exclaim: "You see (this thing) (but) do not tell us what is proper for us that we may do regarding it" (9:11). All the angels are able, ready, and willing to act; unfortunately, they lack specific directives that reflect the eternal plan of God. Angelic intercession is a request for assignment: moving God to reveal His will to the agents of His justice. Accordingly, those beings that execute the vengeance of heaven exercise the highest intercessory function in the book.

In all three capacities, the celestial beings concentrate upon the destiny of the righteous; their suffering is at the focal point of angelic activity. This is especially true of the souls of the dead, whose petitions only the Watchers can represent. Supremely appalled by their plight, the angels apply all their energies towards their vindication. The dead are hardly unremembered: their situation receives cosmic attention.

CHAPTER 2

SIMILITUDES OF ENOCH (1 Enoch 37-71)¹

Background

Archeologists have not recovered any fragment of the *Similitudes of Enoch* (or, the *Book of Parables*) at Qumran, making it the only unrepresented portion of 1 Enoch.² Consequently, ascertaining the date of this second text of the 1 Enochian corpus has become a controversial endeavor. A 1979 symposium hosted by the *Journal for New Testament Studies* (and led by Charlesworth, Christopher Mearns, and M. A. Knibb) contested the late date proposed by J. T. Millik, instead agreeing upon a date of composition in the first century C.E.³ Mearns cites primitive Christian parallels to the eschatology of the *Similitudes* as evidence of the latter work's composition sometime around the year 40 CE.⁴ Knibb framed his argument in terms of the *Similitudes'* similarities to 2 Baruch and 4 Ezra.⁵

1. J. H. Charlesworth, "1 (Ethiopian Apocalypse of) Enoch: A New Translation and Introduction," 5-89.

2. Hanan Eshel, "Enoch, Books of" in *Encyclopedia of the Dead Sea Scrolls*, vol. 1, ed. L. H. Schiffman and J. C. Vanderkam (New York: Oxford, 2000), 251.

3. J. H. Charlesworth, "Seminar Report: The SNTS Pseudepigrapha Seminars at Tübingen and Paris on the Books of Enoch," *New Testament Studies* 25, no. 3. (1979): 322.

4. Christopher L. Mearns. "Dating the *Similitudes of Enoch*," *New Testament Studies* 25, no. 3 (1979): 368-369.

5. M. A. Knibb. "The Date of the *Parables of Enoch*," *New Testament Studies* 25, no. 3. (1979): 358.

Survey

The book's second similitude/parable (45-59) opens with an ode against "those who deny the name of the Lord of Spirits and the congregation of the holy ones" (45:1). This song prophesies the enthronement of "my Elect One": the messianic figure destined to judge the universe (45:3). He will reward the righteous, "who have appealed to my glorious name" (45:3-6), but condemn sinners, destroying "them from before the face of the earth" (45:2,6).

Successive chapters recapitulate the events foretold in this initial ode. First, Enoch beholds a vision of the Son of Man, equivalent to the Elect One referenced in the previous chapter (46:1-5, cf. 45:3-5). Enoch's angelic guide introduces this figure as the instrument of God's justice, the coming universal King, and the One destined to open the "hidden storerooms" of souls in physical resurrection (46:3). A review of humanity's wickedness at the time of the Messiah's arising follows, in which those who "do not extol and glorify" God are condemned (46:5). Many of the saints particularly suffer under the oppression of the earth's wicked; the text describes the celestial reaction as follows:

In those days, the prayers of the righteous ascended into heaven, and the blood of the righteous from the earth before the Lord of Spirits. There shall be days when all the holy ones who dwell in the heavens above shall dwell (together). And with one voice they shall supplicate and pray—glorifying, praising, and blessing the name of the Lord of Spirits—on behalf of the blood of the righteous ones which has been shed. Their prayers shall not stop from exhaustion before the Lord of the Spirits—neither will they relax forever—(until) judgment is executed for them. (47:1-2)

Analysis

The "holy ones" referenced in this passage include the righteous who rest "underneath the wings of the Lord of Spirits" as they await their bodily resurrection (39:4,7). Previously described as being in a

state of continual intercession, the souls are pictured praying on behalf of the children of Israel (39:5). Now, in view of the increasing slaughter of the saints (exemplified by the shed blood metaphorically ascending before the Lord), and in earnest anticipation of the consummation of the Age, the spirits of the righteous dead transition to a final phase of intercessory activity.

First, the spirits congregate more closely together, their movement foreshadowing the final gathering of all the righteous (cf. 48:1-2). This concentration of local position is accompanied by a concentration of their intercessory powers. Invoking the spilled blood of the martyrs, the holy ones plead with greater urgency for the execution of God's justice in favor of the righteous, refusing to relent until the end of the Age. A new desperation, precipitated by the unparalleled agony of the righteous on earth, compels the souls of the dead to cry out in commensurate anguish. Intimate bonds of love and solidarity transcend even the abyss of death, binding the believers above to their brethren below.

According to Enoch, the eschatological Day of Judgment arrives as a direct response to this event. In a passage reminiscent of Daniel 7:9-10, the prophet envisions the Day of Judgment:

In those days, I saw him—the Antecedent of Time, while he was sitting upon the throne of his glory, and the books of the living ones were open before him The hearts of the holy ones are filled with joy, because the number of the righteous has been offered, the prayers of the righteous ones have been heard, and the blood of the righteous has been admitted before the Lord of the Spirits." (47:3-4)

Cultic language is used in verse 4: the number of the righteous must be *offered*, the blood of the righteous *admitted*, and the prayers of the righteous *heard*. These verbs envision a sacrificial ritual in which the blood of the martyrs is offered to God, accompanied by the prayers of the saints. Martyrdom—the forfeiture of life itself in faithful

obedience—sanctifies and admits the petitions of the saints before God as a votive libation.

This concept is deepened in the reference made to "the number of the righteous" (*numerus praedestinatorum*): presumably, the complete number of the righteous. Framed as a condition for the end of the age, the author intimates that Heaven awaits the perfection of the sanguinary oblation, that is, the complete number of those whose lives will be "offered" in martyrdom. Once that sacrifice is perfected, consummated, and admitted before the Lord of Spirits, the eschatological judgment commences.

Consequently, the gathering of the holy ones in intercessory prayer (predicted in 47:2) is liturgical. The assembly of heaven unites in an eschatologically-inspired worship, earnestly inviting the advent of the Messiah (and the passing of this present Age). At the climax of this ritual lies the presentation of the sacrifice. An acceptable offering is made of the firstfruits of humanity: the martyrs.

References to angelic mediation appear throughout the book; for example, an angelic guide identifies Gabriel as the celestial being continually "praying on behalf of those who dwell upon the earth and supplicating in the name of the Lord of the Spirits" (40:19). However, no mention is made of any angelic presentation of the corporate intercession of 47:1-2. Instead, the passage speaks of the "holy ones who dwell in the heavens" (47:1), which includes the saints (cf. 51:2) and the heavenly hosts. In 39:5, the dwelling places of the righteous are said to rest beside "the holy angels;" the Hebrew parallelism at play in this verse indicates that these angels are also included among the host generally referred to as "the holy ones:"

So there my eyes saw their dwelling places with the holy angels,
And their resting places with the holy ones. (39:5, emphasis mine)

At the very least, one should note that no angelic intercessor is assigned to the souls of the righteous dead, to serve as their proxy. This omission intimates the needlessness of such mediation. The saints enjoy an exceptional access to the Lord, as suggested by the intimacy inherent in the image of resting beneath the wings of God (39:7). On the symbolic level, this zoomorphism expresses the maternal tenderness of God towards His children, and the filial tenderness of the saints towards God: evocative of a hen brooding over her chicks. Moving language memorializes the prophet's rapture at the contemplation of this reality:

[Beneath his wings] I wanted to dwell;
and my soul desired that dwelling place.
Already my portion is there;
for thus it has been reserved for me before the Lord of Spirits.
(39:8)

Visually, Enoch also presents this metonymy as a measure of local proximity. Unlike the cosmology of the Book of Watchers, in which the spirits of the righteous rest away from God's immediate presence, the Similitudes of Enoch conceives of the righteous as (locally) dwelling beside the Lord. Raphael eternally blesses the "the Elect One and the elect ones who are clinging to the Lord of Spirits" (40:5,9). Elsewhere, the saints in their dwelling places are described as standing before the Lord (39:6,7), upon the wings of the Lord (40:2), and beside the holy angels (39:5; 40:2). Each image reinforces the idea that the saints are as proximally near to the presence of Divinity as the angels, or perhaps nearer. Therefore, they require no mediator: the saints enjoy a singular audience with the ear and heart of God. United with this transcendent One, they are cosmized (i.e., they acquire a new cosmic significance).

CHAPTER 3

4 EZRA (2 Esdras 3-11)¹

Background

4 Ezra constitutes the core (chaps. 3-14) of an expanded apocalypse referred to as 2 Esdras (chaps. 1-2 and 15-16 are later Christian additions).² Internal factors suggest that a Jewish writer (probably living in Palestine) penned the text several years after the destruction of the Temple in 70 CE.³ In historical-literary context, 4 Ezra appears to have been written in response to that event; Ezra himself represents the Jew of the writer's day, struggling to see the purposes of God when confronted with the traumatic "desolation of Zion" under the Romans (cf. 3:2).

Survey

Ezra is overwhelmed with anxiety as the apocalypse begins. Lamenting over the desolation of Zion, he agonizingly cries out to the Lord, reviewing the sins of mankind from Adam until the exile (3:1-36). In response, Uriel the archangel appears to comfort and enlighten the priest. He assures Ezra that "the age is hastening swiftly to its end";

1. B. M. Metzger, "The Fourth Book of Ezra: A New Translation and Introduction," in *The Old Testament Pseudepigrapha*, vol. 1, *Apocalyptic Literature and Testaments*, ed. J. H. Charlesworth (Garden City, NY: Doubleday, 1983), 516-559.

2. David A. DeSilva, *Introducing the Apocrypha: Message, Content, and Significance* (Grand Rapids: Baker Academic, 2002), 323.

3. Metzger, 520. A historical survey of the dating of 4 Ezra is available in Alden John Thomson, *Responsibility for Evil in the Theodicy of IV Ezra*, SBL Dissertation Series, no. 29 (Missoula, MT: Scholar's Press, 1977), 85-107.

the crop of sin first sown in Adam's heart soon to be harvested (4:26-32).

The approaching end of the world becomes the focal point of their discussion. Still in a state of despair, Ezra inquires: "How long and when will these things be? Why are our years few and evil?" (4:33). Uriel responds by affirming like sentiments of urgency in the heart of God, "You do not hasten faster than the Most High, for your haste is for yourself, but the Highest hastens on behalf of many" (4:34). The "many" for whom the Lord hastens are then described:

"Did not the souls of the righteous in their chambers ask about these matters, saying, 'How long are we to remain here? And when will come the harvest of our reward?' And Jeremiel the archangel answered them and said, 'When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled.' " (4:35-37)

Further detail concerning these souls is related in chapter 7 (within the book's Third Vision). Evidently, the spirits of the righteous dead "are guarded by angels in profound quiet" (7:85,95) within "habitations" or "chambers" (7:95,101). In their ascent to these dwelling places, they are told of "the glory that awaits them in the last days" (7:95), including the transformation of their bodies to the effect that they will shine like the stars and sun of heaven (7:97). Passing through "seven orders" of such revelations, they are at last gathered to the other spirits awaiting glorification (7:98-101). While in that state, the souls inquire of their angelic hosts regarding the nearness of their reward (as earlier).

After receiving a detailed review of the events leading up to the Day of Judgment, Ezra at last beholds the end:

And the earth shall give up those who are asleep in it; and the chambers shall give up the souls which have been committed to them. And the Most High shall be revealed upon the seat of judgment, and recompense shall follow, and the reward shall be manifested;

righteous deeds shall awake, and unrighteous deeds shall not sleep. Then the pit of torment shall appear, and opposite it the Paradise of delight. (7:32-37)

Analysis

Ezra's anguish provides a frame of reference for understanding the impatience of the righteous souls in the intermediate state: a proposition intimated by Uriel's comparison of the inquiries of both (cf. 4:33,35). The exhaustion, pain, and anxiety exhibited in Ezra's prayers and exchanges through chapter 4 enhance one's appreciation of the desperation expressed in the cry "How long . . . ?" This restlessness only increases after his vision of the heavenly glory (4:26-33). In like manner, Uriel's revelation of an eternal happiness further agitates the souls (cf. 4:26-33). Mixed with the peace, confidence, and "great joy" springing from the prospect of their coming reward (7:90, 98), the spirits of the righteous suffer a proportional agitation: their hope fosters impatience.

Interestingly, the souls in 4 Ezra are not fixated upon the execution of judgment upon the wicked, as are their counterparts in the Enochian texts. Instead, they await a positive recompense, in the form of a resurrection of glory. Individual reward is valued, a prize unconnected to the fate of others: "when will come the harvest of our reward?" (4:35). Most likely, this reality reflects the fact that the souls described in 4 Ezra 4,7 are drawn from all the righteous dead, not simply from the martyrs. If limited to this latter class, a desire for vindication and justice upon the wicked would likely motivate their clamoring, as it does in other apocalyptic texts (cf. Rev 6:9-11).

In fact, the themes of martyrdom or unjust oppression are absent in 4 Ezra. Rather, the consequences of individual (and national) sin are emphasized. Ezra's opening supplications decry the "evil heart" of man (3:20, 25), responsible for Adam's transgression (3:7), and Israel's

unfaithfulness to God, the latter of which directly resulted in the Exile. Consequently, individual reward is also emphasized: the attainment of eternal glory serving as an encouragement for obedience and purity.

Surprisingly, Ezra expects the righteous to express pity before the punishment of the wicked. He asks whether the intercessions of the righteous might profit the condemned on the day of their Judgment (7:[102-103]). Uriel's reply reinforces the author's stress on the individual burden of sin:

The day of judgment is decisive and displays to all the seal of truth. . . . No one shall ever pray for another on that day, neither shall anyone lay a burden on another, for then everyone shall bear his own righteousness or unrighteousness no one will then be able to have mercy on him who has been condemned in the judgment, or to harm him who is victorious. (7:[104-105,115])

The choice between good and evil is central to this apocalypse. Man's decision is personal, fully circumscribed within his own conscience; the pride of the righteous is, simply, that their souls have been found worthy. The success or punishment of any other human being is irrelevant:

This is the meaning of the contest which every man on earth shall wage, that if he is defeated he shall suffer what you have said, but if he is victorious he shall receive what I have said. Therefore, there shall not be grief at their damnation, so much as joy over those to whom salvation is assured. (7:[127-128,131])

Angelic mediation is absent in this passage; the celestial hosts do not expressly engage in intercessory activity on behalf of the saints. However, the angels are important intermediaries in the passages that speak of the righteous dead. Cosmologically, the saints are depicted as resting apart from God's throne. Therefore, as those assigned to guard the dwelling places of the souls, the angels are the only heavenly beings accessible to the saints. They stand in a unique position to answer the

questions of the saints, and reveal God's will to them, as does Jeremiel the archangel when asked of the approach of the end of the world.

Jeremiel responds to the question "How long are we to remain here?" with the prophecy, "When the number of those like yourselves is completed; for he has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times by measure, and numbered the times by number; and he will not move or arouse them until that measure is fulfilled" (4: 36-37). The "number of those like yourselves" is the complete number of the righteous dead. When all who are destined to die finally expire, the measure of the age will be full, and only then will God move to defend the saints.

Jeremiel's words allude to an earlier passage in the same apocalypse. At the beginning of their exchanges, Uriel challenges Ezra: "Weigh for me the weight of fire, or measure for me a measure of wind, or call back for me the day that is past" (4:5) to prove himself worthy of the divine secrets of the next world. At Ezra's frustration (in view of the human impossibility of these tasks), Uriel responds: "You cannot understand the things with which you have grown up; how then can your mind comprehend the way of the Most High?" (4:10-11; cf. 4:1).

As a foil to Ezra's weakness, Jeremiel reveals "the way" of the Most High in 4:36-37 when he declares that God "has weighed the age in the balance, and measured the times." Transcending time itself, the Eternal Mind weighs all human history—millennia upon millennia—as if it were a single unit (i.e., fire, wind, yesterday). He sees the inevitable end of human history and reduces that knowledge to a single number: the number of the dead, which when complete will signal the end of the Age.

Time, therefore, revolves around the fate of the departed. The experience of death does not lead a man to irrelevancy, but to cosmic relevancy: he is a catalyst toward the eschaton. And in the intermediate state, man stands on the threshold of an everlasting tomorrow that even

the living cannot grasp. The meaning of death is positively transformed within the eschatological vision of 4 Ezra.

CHAPTER 4

APOCALYPSE OF JOHN (REVELATION)

Background

The only Christian apocalypse included in this survey, Revelation was composed by a man named John (1:9), traditionally identified with the apostle by the same name.¹ The patristic testimony and several internal factors suggest a probable date of composition around the year 95 C.E.² John also identifies his audience: the apocalypse is addressed to seven Christian communities in Asia Minor (1:4; 2:1-3:22)

Survey

John's apocalypse begins with a vision of Christ, "the Alpha and Omega," who has arisen victorious over death (1:13-18). He commissions John to record seven messages delivered to the angels superintending seven churches in Asia Minor. These messages encourage and reprove the churches, many of which are experiencing persecution, urging them to "be faithful unto death" (2:10).

Afterwards, a voice summons John the prophet to the throne of God (4:1-2) to see "what is to take place," marking the beginning of the

1. The earliest testimony in favor of this identification is found in the writings of St. Justin Martyr, who writes of "John, one of the apostles of Christ, who prophesied, by a revelation that was made to him" (*Dialogue of Justin* 81.4).

2. For a full discussion, see David Aune, *Word Biblical Commentary* 52A: *Revelation 1-5*, ed. David A. Hubbard and Glenn W. Barker (Dallas, TX: Word Books, 1997), lvi-lxx.

vision of the seven seals. There, John beholds the throne of God the Almighty, and myriads of the heavenly hosts attending him (4:3-11; 5:11-14). It is at the beginning of Revelation's fifth chapter that John's attention is redirected towards a seven-sealed scroll, resting at the right-hand of God. Although no explicit mention is made as to the contents of this scroll, one supposes that the scroll carries a cosmic significance, intimately related to the destiny of the saved (cf. 5:9-10, 13); consequently, John weeps profusely when at first no creature is found worthy to unseal the book (5:3-4).

Fortunately, "the Lamb standing as if it had been slaughtered" (a figure of the resurrected Christ, 5:6) is found worthy; he receives the scroll, and is met with exuberant songs of praise from the heavenly hosts (5:7-13). Among these are two specific classes of celestial beings: "the four living creatures" and "the twenty-four elders," whose primary activities are represented through cultic imagery (where harps symbolize adoration, and incense bowls represent intercession):

When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints.
(5:10)

The enthusiastic songs of thanksgiving issued by these (intercessory) beings represent the joy of the redeemed themselves (5:9-10), who then also participate in the universal praise (5:13).

As the sixth chapter begins, the Lamb begins to break open the seals (6:1). Accompanying the breaking of the first four seals are successive, prophetic glimpses, representing the spread of conquest, bloodshed, famine, and death across the earth in the form of four horsemen (6:1-8). The vision continues,

When the Lamb broke the fifth seal, I saw underneath the altar the souls of those who had been slain because of the word of God, and because of the testimony which they had maintained; and they cried out with a loud voice, saying, "How long, O Lord, holy and

true, will You refrain from judging and avenging our blood on those who dwell on the earth?" And there was given to each of them a white robe; and they were told that they should rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be completed also. (Rev 6:9-11)

Analysis

Strikingly, the structure and content of Revelation 6:9-11 parallels that of 2 Esdras 4:33-36, as illustrated below:

- A. Introduction (2 Esdr 4:35a; Rev 6:9)
- B. Dialogue
 - 1. Plea of the Righteous Souls (2 Esdr 4:35b; Rev 6:10)
 - "How long . . . ?"
 - 2. Divine Reply (2 Esdr 4:36-37 [mediated]; Rev 6:11)
 - "Until the [number of the dead] . . . is completed."

And yet, several details distinguish John's apocalypse. First, one notes the distribution of a temporary reward ("a white robe") to each saint while they are still in the intermediate period, that is, before the bestowal of the full reward promised in 22:12. Unlike 4 Ezra, where the righteous dead receive only the hope of a coming reward, the souls of the dead in Revelation receive some immediate, positive compensation for their sufferings (however incomplete): a foretaste of their full vindication and eternal bliss.

The sign value of the robes in 6:11 is difficult to ascertain. Elsewhere in Revelation, a white robe speaks of the recipient's righteousness (7:15; 19:8), victory (3:5), and perhaps also, incorporation into the heavenly realms and its priestly functions (cf. 4:4; 15:7-8; 19:14).

Also in contrast to 4 Ezra, Revelation is fixated on the theme of martyrdom. The souls identified in Rev 6:9 are "those who had been slain because of the Word of God." Also, the saints are invited to "rest for a little while longer, until the number of their fellow servants and their brethren who were to be killed even as they had been, would be

completed also" (6:11). Heaven awaits the completion of the number of the *martyrs*, and not simply the number of all the righteous dead, as in 4 Ezra.

Either as a particular class of the righteous, or (in synecdoche) as the representatives of all the righteous, the martyrs figure prominently into the text. This fact largely reflects the centrality of theodicy (the contested righteousness of God) as a theme in the book of Revelation. In a world of violence and evil, the promises of God appear to fail. Nowhere is this more apparent than in the death of the saints (a consideration especially relevant to those persecuted communities to which Revelation was written): their tragic experience precipitates the theodical controversy addressed in the apocalypse.

The martyrs appeal to God, as Judge and Protector, to vindicate His character and at last fulfill His word by refusing to countenance the wicked deeds of men. Their plea ("avenge our blood") uses a Greek verb implying legal action (*ἐκδικέω*); the martyrs thirst for justice according to the terms of covenantal fidelity, not revenge.³ Their struggle is moved by a sense of equity: blood for blood. The cry "how long?" expresses their desperation to see this judgment of God executed; unlike 4 Ezra, it is fixated upon the compensation of just vengeance—not personal reward.

In the midst of the seven bowl judgments (15-16), one finds the partial fulfillment of these prayers, again framed within the context of divine justice. God requires the blood of his saints at the hands of those who have shed it (Gen 9:5-6):

3. Ranko Stefanovic, *Revelation of Jesus Christ: Commentary on the Book of Revelation* (Berrien Springs, MI: Andrews University, 2002), 238, 240.

And I heard the angel of the waters say,
 'You are just, O Holy One, who are and were,
 for you have judged these things;
 because they shed the blood of saints and prophets,
 you have given them blood to drink.
 It is what they deserve!'

And I heard the altar respond,
 'Yes, O Lord God, the Almighty,
 your judgments are true and just!' (16:5-7)

The final destruction of "Babylon the Great" represents the climax of God's vindictive judgments (18-19). Again, the vindication of the blood of the martyrs is central:

After this I heard what seemed to be the loud voice of a great multitude in heaven, saying,
 'Hallelujah!
 Salvation and glory and power to our God,
 for his judgments are true and just;
 he has judged the great whore
 who corrupted the earth with her fornication,
 and he has avenged on her the blood of his servants.' (19:1-2; cf. 18:20)

Accordingly, 6:9-11 proves pivotal in the plot and structure of the entire apocalypse. The judgments encompassing much of the rest of the book (7-9, 14-21) arrive in direct response to the slaughter of the righteous, symbolically introduced in this passage. Through the image of martyrdom, the passage both introduces the theodical issues central to the apocalypse's plot and foreshadows their impending resolution.

Comparisons may also be drawn between Revelation and the ideas contained in the Similitudes of Enoch. For example, the deaths of "those who had been slain because of the word of God" are intimately related to the idea of sacrifice. In martyrdom, the righteous follow the model of "the [sacrificial] Lamb" of God, who also was "slain," and appears at the beginning of the vision of the Seals: 5:6,9,12; 13:8; cf. 6:9; 11:8-11; 14:4). Thus, the saints are proven worthy "to receive power and riches and wisdom and might and honor and glory and blessing" with their Master

(5:12). ⁴ As the lives of the saints were oriented towards the worship of God, their deaths (a consequence of that worship, cf. 13:14-17; 20:4-5) are transfigured into supreme acts of worship.

Revelation's use of cultic imagery (a distinguishing motif within the apocalypse) reinforces this metaphor. Several passages allude to articles connected with Jewish worship, portraying the celestial realms as a temple in the Jewish pattern (6:9; 8:3-4; 11:19; 15:5; etc.). The bronze altar (upon which holocausts were consumed) is inserted into 6:9-11 as a conceit, symbolizing sacrifice. Thereupon were the martyrs offered: their blood flowing as a libation beneath it. Instead of depicting the souls within a literal (celestial) setting, the writer selects a figurative location to accent the spiritual meaning of their plight.

Moreover, the particularly exalted nature of this figurative setting highlights the cosmic significance of martyrdom. This heavenly liturgy, celebrated by the heavenly hosts, embraces three votive elements ascending from the earth: hymnody (that is, the thanksgivings of the saints: 14:3; 5:13), incense (the prayers of the saints, 5:8), and blood sacrifice (the deaths of the saints, 6:9-11). In the Jewish ritual tradition, the bronze altar lay at the heart of the daily worship of Israel; likewise, the sacrificial altar attending the eternal Throne of God holds a central place in the celestial cult. The murder of each righteous individual is of inestimable value before God, a singular offering recognized by the universe that worships Him.

4. A more explicit example of recapitulation occurs in Rev 11, where the slain witnesses rest for three and a half days in Jerusalem, "where also their Lord was crucified," until they are resurrected, and ascend to heaven upon a cloud (11:7-12).

Another parallel to the Similitudes of Enoch follows this conceit. Those already martyred anticipate the slaughter of their brothers, until the number of the slain is complete.⁵ In other words, more lives are yet to be "offered" upon the heavenly altar before the universal Judgment commences. Christian martyrdom becomes eschatologically significant, manifesting the setting of the wheel of time. A cosmic grasp of martyrdom therefore invigorates Christ's encouragement to "be faithful until death," directed towards suffering Christian communities (2:10).

Although no celestial beings are directly referenced in 6:9-11, their ministration is integral to the cultic imagery of Revelation. They appear throughout the book as mediators: interceding on behalf of the righteous at the beginning of the vision. In those passages, also embraced by the apocalypse's cultic motif, their activity is expressed in liturgical language. Celestial beings exercise priestly functions: ministering before and with the cultic articles mentioned in the apocalypse (altars, bowls of incense). In the vision of the Seals, one again references the offering up of the prayers of the saints:

When he had taken the scroll, the four living creatures and the twenty-four elders fell before the Lamb, each holding a harp and golden bowls full of incense, which are the prayers of the saints. (5:8)

In this light, one might implicitly assume some angelic ministration with connection to the martyrs of Rev 6:9-11. Certainly, descriptions of the activities of angelic ministers pervade other cultic passages (see especially 8:3-4 [the vision of the seven trumpets], in

5. While it is true that the word "number" (αριθμη) does not appear in the Greek NT text of Revelation, the similarity between Rev 6:9-11 with 4 Ezra 4:35-37 leads scholars to validly assume its implicit presence.

connection to the golden altar); similar involvement would be expected with relation to the bronze altar, even without an explicit mention of such beings. Furthermore, the only recorded prayer issued from humans in the apocalypse (which suffices as a prototypical example of the "prayers of the saints" presented by the heavenly hosts in 5:8) is the cry of the martyred souls. Again, one might legitimately assume that the prayers of the martyred saints are (at least) included among these prayers; that is, that the entire vision of the opening of the seals intimates that the prayers of the souls of the dead are presented through the intercession of celestial beings.

Notwithstanding, a second function of the celestial hosts emerges in later visions that *is* definitely related to the vision of the fifth seal. There, the angels double as the agents of God's vengeance, executing the divine judgments requested by the righteous in 6:10-11. In this capacity their sacerdotal role remains intact: while retaining the appearance of priests (15:5-6), the angels of the presence use the vessels of the angelic ministration as instruments of God's judgment. In 15:7, seven angels pour out "golden bowls full of the wrath of God" upon the inhabitants of the earth, evoking memories of the "golden bowls of incense" used to present the prayers of the saints in 5:8. Likewise, John notes that the censer used to offer up the prayers of the saints in 8:3 is wielded against the earth: "Then the angel took the censer and filled it with fire from the altar and threw it on the earth; and there were peals of thunder, rumblings, flashes of lightning, and an earthquake" (8:3). In other places, judgment issues from the golden altar upon which incense is offered (8:5; 9:13; 14:18; 16:7) or from the heavenly temple itself (15:6).

These examples underscore the intimate, causal unity between the petitions of the saints and the execution of divine justice. The prayers

of the righteous, connected with the cultic articles of the celestial liturgy, instigate or advance the divine response. Especially in this second function, the angels attend to the needs of the saints, both living and dead; the later especially are preeminently positioned in the divine plan governing the universe.

CONCLUSION

The Judeo-Christian apocalyptic texts embraced by this survey relate their visions of the righteous dead (who impatiently long for the consummation of the age) to the activities of celestial beings. Members of the latter class attend to the saints as intercessory partners, mediatorial proxies, divine representatives, or instruments of justice. Through these interactions, the apocalyptic writers highlight the centrality of the righteous dead in the larger eschatological drama unfolding in each text. A new cosmic vision of death emerges: one that transcends the primitive figures of complaining blood.

For example, the final judgment is oriented toward the vindication of the martyrs: angels functioning as both the revelators of this impending fate and the primary executors of divine punishment. Moreover, the timing of this judgment proves intimately associated with the destiny of every individual on the planet. This is evident in the prophecies delivered by angels, which specify that the consummation of the age is contingent upon the soon fulfillment of some (unknown) quantity of the righteous departed. Additionally, martyrdom (now transfigured into an act of worship) finds an exalted place in the celestial liturgies that climactically peak at the end of time. The celestial beings who function as the chief celebrants in those liturgies unite their eternal praise to the blood sacrifice ascending from the earth—human pain transformed into universal joy.

Finally, a positive conception of the post-mortem fate of the martyrs emerges, completing the writers' new vision. The righteous slain

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Southern Scholars Honors Program Senior Project

Name Hugo Mendez

Date 2/19/06

Major English, B.A.



Southern Scholars
southern scholars.southern.edu
wmclarty@southern.edu

A significant scholarly project, involving research, writing, or special performance, appropriate to the major in question, is ordinarily completed the senior year. The project is expected to be of sufficiently high quality to warrant a grade of A and to justify public presentation.

Under the guidance of a faculty advisor, the Senior Project should be an original work, should use primary sources when applicable, should have a table of contents and works cited page, should give convincing evidence to support a strong thesis, and should use the methods and writing style appropriate to the discipline.

The completed project, to be turned in in duplicate, must be approved by the Honors Committee in consultation with the student's supervising professor three weeks prior to graduation. Please include the advisor's name on the title page. The 23 hours of credit for this project is done as directed study or in a research class.

Keeping in mind the above Senior Project description, please describe in as much detail as you can the project you will undertake. You may attach a separate sheet if you wish:

As part of a 2-3 hr. Directed Study entitled "Revelation in Jewish Apocalyptic Context" (RELB 495), I will write a 15-20 pp. paper analyzing the function of the motif of souls crying out for justice as present in 1 Enoch 9, 22, 47; 4 Ezra 4; and Rev 6. Special attention will be paid to the cultic significance of John's application of the same motif.

Signature of faculty advisor Edwin Reynolds Expected date of completion 3/15/06

This project has been completed as planned (date) 5/2/06 (extension granted)

This is an "A" project Yes This project is worth 2-3 hours of credit 2 hrs.

Advisor's Final Signature Edwin Reynolds

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Dear Advisor, please write your final evaluation of the project on the reverse side of this page. Comment on the characteristics that make this A "quality work."